

Women in Real Estate:

CRE pros bring their expertise to *REDNews* summit

REDNews was proud to host our second-annual Women in Real Estate summit on Sept. 24 at The Briar Club. The day included a lively discussion about the accomplishments of Texas CRE professionals, challenges they face and the state of the industry in 2019. The following are highlights from one of the four panel discussions.

PANEL #2: CURRENT WORKPLACE ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN



Taucha Hogue

Edna Meyer-Nelson, founder/president/CEO of The Richland Companies, helped guide the discussion with panelists: Courtney Cole, managing director at JLL; Taucha Hogue, director of capital markets for NKF; Leann Karim, shareholder at Wilson Cribbs + Goren; and Tina Phillips, human capital management director at ADP.



Edna Meyer-Nelson

The first topic of conversation was flexibility in the workplace, which has increased in popularity as employees fight for a work/life balance.

Phillips has a unique perspective as someone who's led human resources teams in multiple industries, ranging from healthcare to nonprofits. She pointed out early on that remote work and flexible work don't mean the same thing, but they are inherently tied to one another. Throughout her seven years at ADP, she's worked remotely from her home office, just as her 11 employees do.



Leann Karim

"It requires a great deal of flexibility," she said, adding that she's learned a number of things about flexible work in this role. "First, to make it work, you must have access to collaboration technologies. Whether that's Skype, whether it's Link, whether it's WebX, it's a way to make sure that we're still staying connected, even though we can't walk out to an office and say, 'Hey, let's go grab a cup of coffee.'"

She also said it's important to set clear expectations between the leader and employees about when work is getting done and what that work product is.



Sue Rogers

But the most important factor, she said, was getting rid of the "butts-in-seats" mentality that we all seem to have grown up with.

"We commonly think if your butt isn't in your seat in that cube, you're not getting work done, which is crazy," she told our crowd.

For Karim, a real estate lawyer who spends most of her time on transactions for the acquisition, leasing, and disposition of commercial properties throughout Texas, her schedule has inherent flexibility because she bills in six-minute increments.

"That means that I can rearrange some of those blocks to an extent to make time to go to the boys' school and doctor's appointments. I have three kids, so there's constantly a function going on that I need to attend," she said. "Our clients are all over the place and not always in an office, so it didn't really make sense that I always had to be there, too. If I have a laptop, internet connection and a cell phone, I can do my job anywhere. So that's really helped me make more time to go to the school, to volunteer, to take them to the doctor, and be more present."

Karim also has flexibility via a reduced schedule, which she requested after she had her first son. No one else in her firm had done so, so there was no example to learn from. Initially, her request was denied.

"Three days later, the answer was yes, and I've been doing it for eight years. It's been successful enough that we have

another attorney who is also on a four-day schedule," she said.

Working remotely on a consistent basis isn't an option for Hogue, who says "it counts to be seen."

"I'm at the office every hour that I can be and I love it. I love being around people, I love what I do, and I love working," she said, while adding that she can run into unexpected challenges as a single mom. "I am going to have to leave sometimes or have combinations that are different than other team members."

Just as the previous panelists had, this group stressed the importance of finding a mentor to guide you through the occasional obstacles in the workplace. Cole pointed out that it's as simple as asking a simple question.

"If there's someone you admire and want to get to know, I think most people are very approachable. Just call that person up and tell them, 'Cortney said I should connect with you. Would you like to have a cup of coffee?'" she said, mentioning that the mentorship environment has come a long way from when she started in the industry. "People didn't have female mentors because there weren't very many. The outlets were organizations like CREW and you kind of grew up in the industry together. You did mentor one another."

Also be aware, Phillips noted, that you may need different mentors for different stages of your life. She offered herself as an example.

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“At ADP, I wanted to find somebody to help me through the political-ness of that company because it was 55,000 employees. How do you navigate the politics and the policies to get what you need as an owner of my small business, right?” she said. “I think you need to identify what you need out of that mentor, communicate with that mentor and then ask those types of questions for stewardship.”

That person can also help you trust your own voice, which is something women often struggle with as a result of Imposter syndrome. It’s the feeling that your success isn’t real, but the result of a fluke or luck. There’s a constant voice in your head telling you that you didn’t earn your success or that you don’t deserve that.

“It can be really damaging to your confidence to continue to have that voice running through. You don’t take that chance, you don’t apply for the job because maybe you only fit eight of the 10 criteria. I think women are really bad about that,” Karim said. “The way to combat that is to talk back to that inner voice every single time it occurs, and find an argument for whatever it is. Continue that cycle until that voice goes away and you can regain that confidence in yourself.”

Cole added that confidence is part science (some people are born with it), but it’s also part volition (we can make the choice). She encouraged women to take action because, either way, you will grow your confidence.

“Even if you fail, you learned you can take a risk and try something new,” she said. “This is a generalization, but women find action sometimes harder than men because we’re so risk-averse. Our fear of failure is enormous and we’re oftentimes perfectionists.”

We also have to walk the societal balance between being a strong leader and being well-liked. It’s possible to be both, our panelists argued.

“There are two underlying principles: take care and take charge,” explained Hogue. “If you take care, you’re well liked but if you take charge, you’re seen as a leader. For us as women, when we take charge, we’re seen as emotional, too aggressive, self-performing, kind of a negative connotation. While we may be seen as competent, we’re less liked. So we’re stuck in that Double-Bind paradigm.”

She mentioned a recent study done by a Columbia professor. The professor took the story of Heidi Roizen, a successful Silicon Valley venture capitalist, and gave it to two groups of students. The first set read about Heidi, the second read a version with the name changed to Howard.

“The set of students who got the Howard story came back and said he’s well-liked, we want to work for him, he’s competent, a great leader. The ones who had the Heidi story said she’s aggressive, emotional, we don’t really think we like her or want to work for her,” Hogue summarized. “It just goes to show how much work we have to do as women to empower each other and to be an advocate for the leaders, get rid of those negative connotations and be advocates for each other.”

Phillips called that an implicit bias that many people carry with them. It’s not as explicit as other biases, such as racism, but it can be just as harmful.

“It’s simply our brains working really quickly to form an opinion based on past experiences and we might not even know it’s happening,” she said. “I did want to make you aware of implicit bias, because we all have blind spots. They’re all around us.”

One issue the women on our panel have not been blind to is sexual harassment, especially as awareness and discussion has increased in the past few years.

“If companies keep addressing it and they keep being diligent about exposing those who are the serious offenders, or even light offenders, like the powerful people that are in trouble right now, that’s where it starts,” said Hogue. “We as employees have to keep being diligent. Stop taking the settlements that silence you for money. Speak out. And we as a community have to support those who speak out so that they don’t feel like there are repercussions.”

Phillips added to that, saying, “We need to support them and we need to help them find a voice. It’s not always easy to do something.”

She recalled a teaching moment when she took a client’s call on her car speaker, her 14-year-old son in the passenger seat. When she apologized for

being out of breath, the man responded with, “Oh, I think your voice is sexy when it’s like that.”

“I thought, ‘Oh, my son just heard that,’” said Phillips. “That was kind of a pivotal moment for me.”

It resulted in her calling the client and explaining why his comment was inappropriate. She said it was an eye-opener for him as well. As awkward as it can be to have that dialogue, Phillips says it’s an important conversation.

Karim shared about experiences that weren’t harassment, but were still troubling.

“I have gone to meetings where, as the attorney, I’m representing the client and they ask me if I’m the secretary,” she recalled. “It’s bothersome.”

That struck a chord with Meyer-Nelson, who weighed in with her own story.

“In the ‘90s, I went in to one of the bigger companies here in town and they asked me if I’d get them some coffee. The young man who was working for me just sat there. He didn’t know what to say. I got up as though I was going to get the coffee, got on the elevator and left,” she said. “They came and saw me the next day and I made them wait for about 30 minutes before I went out to say hello to them. You do get even. Somewhere along the line, guys, you get even.”

You can also get even when it comes to negotiating your salary, said Phillips. It’s all about education and knowing your worth.

“That might mean looking at your employee handbook if you have one to understand your company’s pay programs. Then also arm yourself with good data. There are several reputable websites, such as Glassdoor, Indeed and Salary.com, that you can look at as employees that can help you understand what you should be paid from a market-based standpoint,” she said.

Knowing your worth might mean having to walk away if your employer can’t match it, per Hogue.

“If you don’t take a stand, you’re already starting yourself lower and creating that gap,” she emphasized. “We have to be advocates for ourselves.”

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